

# The **THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN**

Bulletin Twenty-five      October, 1948

The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of several hundred students and followers of the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year. This bulletin is issued occasionally, usually quarterly, by the secretary. All the material, unless otherwise assigned, is compiled and written by the secretary.

The officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and secretary-treasurer:

Walter Harding

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SPECIAL: WE ARE SORRY TO ANNOUNCE THAT OUR SOCIETY FAILED IN ITS OBJECTIVE OF PURCHASING THE THOREAU-ALCOTT HOUSE. FURTHER DETAILS GIVEN INSIDE.

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HENRY DAVID THOREAU

by JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

(New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948. \$3.50)

After years of being mauled and maligned by the critics, Thoreau is at last getting the treatment he deserves. More good studies of Thoreau have come out in the past twenty years than in the preceding eighty. And it is our humble opinion that one of the very best has just now been published. Mr. Krutch's work is not a biography. It does not supersede Dr. Canby's volume of nine years ago. It is instead a critical study of Thoreau's philosophy. It does contain a great deal of biographical information, but it is primarily a study of Thoreau's thought. Mr. Krutch has not scissored and pasted from the already large storehouse of Thoreau scholarship. It is obvious that he has read most of the standard biographies and critical essays. But he has derived his opinions from a close study of Thoreau himself and his writings. Every page of this work shows direct and contemplative contact with Thoreau's works.

First of all, Mr. Krutch emphasizes Thoreau's essential happiness from the beginning of his life to the end. When Thoreau carved "H.H.H." for "Henry, Happy Heathen" on a tree trunk, he wasn't fooling himself. He was one radical who did not feel himself a misfit. But neither does Mr. Krutch go to extremes. There were conflicts in Thoreau's life, and they are carefully pointed out here. That understanding of modern psychology which Mr. Krutch has used so well in his other biographies has proved even more valid here. I would suggest that some of those who have concocted their own pet theories about Thoreau's emotional life read carefully the pages in this book on the subject. I doubt that Thoreau's first experience in the Emerson household was quite the "fiasco" that Mr. Krutch terms it (p. 65). But otherwise I think his interpretations of Thoreau's friendships admirable.

Too, the author's point that Thoreau's was not a well-formulated and perfectly integrated philosophy, that he often contradicted himself over a period of years--and sometimes even on the same day--is one we too often forget. We have all erred in attempting to pigeon-hole his beliefs. We have been too prone to label him a pacifist, a vegetarian, a deist, a primitivist, or whatever our own pet categories are. But he kept wandering out of those neat classifications and Mr. Krutch well points out that it is his very unpredictableness that makes him so human and so appealing. The ten-thousand pages of Thoreau's writings present us with one of the outstanding opportunities to study a mind at work, forming opinions; modifying them, reforming them throughout his life to meet each new situation as each one of us must do if we at all pretend to openmindedness.

Mr. Krutch has much to say about Thoreau's gradually increasing preoccupation with recording natural phenomena and about the reasons for his turning out only two books in a lifetime devoted to writing. There is not room to expound on them here, but they are worth thoughtful reading. He has also so many comments that may seem heresy to some of the more uncritical Thoreau-philosophers. But, if heresies they be, they nonetheless need the saying.

It may seem picayune to point out a few errors of fact in this book, but I hope in later editions they will correct "scudder Middleton" to Townsend



Souder as the author of CONCORD (p. x.); "H.B.Sanborn" to F.B.Sanborn (p. xi); and point out that Thoreau did not read the address on John Brown at North Elba, but rather sent it there to be read by R.J.Hinton (pp. 236-7). I wish too that more of the quotations might have been identified and that an up-to-date critical bibliography had been appended. But these are comparative trivialities. This is a volume we have needed for years. The amount of nonsense and poppycock that has grown up around the "thoreau legend" is perfectly appalling. Mr. Krutch steers a careful course, deflating more of this poppycock and dispelling more of this nonsense than I would have thought it possible for one man to do. He approaches Thoreau sanely and squarely--and that is just what we have needed.

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#### THOREAU ON MONADNOCK

by Dr. LEON A. HAUSMAN

(This is a condensation of a paper read at the Thoreau Society annual meeting in Concord on July 10, 1948.)

Thoreau made four visits to Monadnock. The first was in 1843 or 1844 when he encamped for one night on the summit. The second was in 1852 when he crossed over the mountain on a walk to Troy. The third was on June 2-4, 1858, when he encamped two nights on the summit with his friend Harrison Blake of Worcester. The fourth visit was a week's camping trip with William Ellery Channing in 1860. This was Channing's first camping trip; it was Thoreau's last.

With regard to this last trip with Channing, Thoreau noted that they arrived on the upper ledges of the mountain in a furious storm. After they had made a rude spruce shelter, Thoreau says, "We were almost as wet as if we had stood in a hoghead of water." After toiling up the mountain in the rain, they reached the upper open rocks among the dwarf spruces, and here they made a "tolerable hut," after which they were in the soaked condition he describes. They made a better hut the next day, a substantial house, which, Thoreau says, would have upheld a horse. This was on a rocky plateau with a superb view to the south-east. No one knew where this was for many years after Thoreau's death. At last, in 1918, Allen Chamberlain and Herbert Gleason searched for two days--being guided by the journal descriptions of the site and the view from the site--until they indubitably located it. Five large stones were found near the edge of the rocky shelf, which, it was thought (since they were about evenly spaced), had weighted down the edges of the spruce branches of the hut. The stones were of nearly equal size and of about 20 lbs. weight each. One of them, on being removed, disclosed beneath some extremely old and withered spruce tips. Around the suppositive site of the hut were still standing some very old red spruces, then in a dead or dying condition. Everything accorded perfectly with the details of the journal description. The long-lost hut site had been found.

The great stones which weighted down the edges of the old hut have several years ago been displaced. Four of them have been built (so they were on my last visit there) into a rude fireplace. One of them was, deliberately kicked over the edge (so Mr. Chamberlain affirms) by a "person" who was being shown the spot! Think of it--kicked over the edge by that sacrilegious toe. May a distressful bunion grow upon the same forever!

It is instructive to note, in almost all of Thoreau's journal entries, especially those of any length, how he concludes with a generality, a principle, a law deduced from what he has seen. I have often thought it might be advisable for someone to edit his voluminous journals, using only the last sentence or paragraph of each entry. In this way a "body of philosophy" (if not indeed of divinity) might be thus amalgamated which would come as near as anything could to presenting Thoreau's total philosophy. There is no need to quote chapter and verse in illustrating this habit of Thoreau; but we will give one, drawn from his remark about the impression made by Monadnock. Referring to his climbs about the top of the mountain, he says, "It often reminded me of my walks on the beach, and suggested how much both depend for their sublimity on solitude and dreariness. In both cases we feel the presence of some vast Titanio power."

Thoreau and Monadnock are much alike. Both stand alone, solitary, elevated above the lesser hills, gray, grim, wistful--yet also homey, intimate, drawing one nearer, their spiritual allurements deepening with the years. Emerson has a couplet on Webster which, as well, applies to Henry David Thoreau:

Not on its base Monadnock surer stood  
Than he to common sense and common good.  
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#### REPORT ON THE THOREAU-ALCOTT HOUSE

It is my unpleasant duty to report that the drive to purchase the Thoreau-Alcott House for the Thoreau Society has failed in its objective. On August 28th, the executive committee met in Concord and heard the report of Mrs. Wheeler that a total of \$5789.50 in gifts, pledges, and loans had been raised. While all members were in accord with a desire to see the house purchased by the society, they also agreed that such an undertaking would not be feasible unless the larger portion of the \$25,000 sales price were available. It was thus voted to return all gifts, cancel all pledges, and notify the Pratt heirs of the society's decision not to purchase the house. The house has since been placed on the open market for \$30,000.

We are all very much indebted to the Pratt heirs for their continued and generous cooperation with the committee; to the many newspapers and magazines who aided in the publicity; to the members of the Concord committee--Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Hosmer, Mr. Newbury, Mr. Robbins, and Mrs. Wheeler--who headed the drive; and to the many friends of Thoreau, both members and non-members of the society, who contributed to the funds. Our particular thanks are due Mrs. Wheeler for the many hours and days she devoted whole-heartedly to the campaign.

In the few weeks of the campaign, the society received more favorable publicity than in its entire previous history. Here, briefly, are the notations we have heard of: Editorials: N.Y. TIMES 7/25, AMERICAN VEGETARIAN ?, NEWARK (NJ) NEWS 7/?, N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE 7/23, HARTFORD (Conn) TIMES 7/23, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR 7/24, NEW YORKER 8/7, BOSTON HERALD 8/6, BOSTON POST 7/23, News Items: N.Y. TIMES 7/22 8/16, N.Y. SUN 7/23, EASTON (Pa) EXPRESS 7/22, BOSTON HERALD 7/25 8/15, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR 8/5, BOSTON TRAVELER 7/21, CONCORD JOURNAL 7/15 7/22, CONCORD ENTERPRISE 7/22, CHICAGO TRIBUNE 7/29 8/8, BENNINGTON (Vt) BANNER 7/26, BROCKTON (Mass) ENTERPRISE 7/?, TIME MAGAZINE 8/16; Letter to editor: N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE 7/30. Undoubtedly we have missed many clippings. The secretary would appreciate receiving copies of any notices not listed above.

THIS ISSUE OF THE BULLETIN IS BEING SENT TO ALL THOSE NON-MEMBERS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE SOCIETY'S DRIVE FOR FUNDS. WE REGRET THAT THERE IS NOT ROOM HERE TO LIST THEIR NAMES. BUT WE HOPE THAT EACH WILL CONSIDER THIS A PERSONAL INVITATION TO JOIN OUR SOCIETY. UNFORTUNATELY SOME OF THE ABOVE PUBLICITY LIMITED OUR SOCIETY TO COLLEGE TEACHERS. THERE IS NO SUCH LIMITATION. THE SOCIETY IS OPEN TO ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THOREAU AND WE ARE PROUD THAT OUR ROLLS LIST REPRESENTATIVES OF NEARLY EVERY FIELD OF WORK.

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Just as this bulletin was going to press, we received the sad word from Concord of the death of G. Winthrop Lee, 81. Mr. Lee was the founder and guiding spirit of the Concord Thoreau Group and had been a member of the Thoreau Society since its inception. He also served on the society's executive and nominating committees. His presence will long be missed at our annual meetings in Concord.

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Analysis Book Shop (150 Nassau Street, New York) is announcing Jack Schwartzman's REBELS OF INDIVIDUALISM to be published soon at \$2.50. It will contain an essay on Thoreau.

Several sharp-eyed members have pointed out to us that some of the Book-of-the-Month Club advertisements for the WORLD'S GREAT THINKERS have switched the captions under the portraits of Thoreau and Rousseau.



# ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY

(See preceding page for a bibliography of publicity for the Thoreau-Alcott House Fund Drive.)

- Ballou, Adin. "Mountainside Pasture." NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE. July 31, 1948. An "After Reading Thoreau" sonnet.  
 "The Twilight River." N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. June 26, 1948. Sonnet.
- Boyle, Hal. "He Lives Alone and Likes It." NEW YORK SUN. April 30, 1948. News account of a South Dakota imitator of Thoreau.
- Byron, Gilbert. An "open letter to Thoreau." SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE. June 5, 1948. p.47. On Thoreau as an escapist.
- CONCORD ENTERPRISE. "Annual Thoreau Meeting Held." July 15, 1948.
- Hale, Christopher. "Self-Made Widow." NEW YORK DAILY NEWS. Jan. 6, 1948. A serialized novel about a man who simplified his life inspired by "that cursed Thoreau."
- Hix, Ernest. "Strange as It Seems." BROCKTON (Mass.) ENTERPRISE. Sept. 2, 1948. A syndicated cartoon perpetuating the legend that Thoreau would not pay for his college diploma.
- Ives, Charles. SONATA NO. 2 (CONCORD, MASS., 1840-1860). New York: Columbia Records, 1948. \$7.25. At last we have a recording of Mr. Ives' tribute to the great Concordians. 'This recording by John Kirkpatrick gives everyone the opportunity of hearing what the late Lawrence Gilman of the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE called "the greatest music composed by an American." Musical conservatives may be a little disturbed on first hearing this piano sonata, but we can promise that both its depth and beauty will grow with each re-hearing. We heartily recommend this musical tribute to Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, and Thoreau and hope that this recording will send its listeners to read Mr. Ives' ESSAYS BEFORE A SONATA (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1920) in which they will find much of importance to be said by him on Thoreau and his contemporaries. We would also suggest they look back at THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN #18 for a reprint of the Thoreau theme from this sonata.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. HENRY DAVID THOREAU. See our review on the first page of this bulletin. Other reviews: NEW YORK TIMES, Oct. 3 and 4, 1948; NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, Oct. 3 and 6, 1948.
- Noble, W. Carey. "Undetected Plagiarism." NEW YORK SUN. July 20, 1948. p. 14. A letter to the editor on the source of FDR's "nothing to be feared."
- Oliver, Egbert S. "Cock-A-Doode-Do!" and Transcendental Hocus-Pocus." NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY, XXI (June, 1948), 204-216. Melville's use of A Week as a source for his short story.
- Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience." David, Frederick, and Mott. AMERICAN LITERATURE: AN ANTHOLOGY AND CRITICAL SURVEY. New York: Scribners, 1948. I, 782-876. With excerpts from other works of Thoreau.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "My Prayer." BOSTON POST. July 12, 1948. With commentary.
- \_\_\_\_\_. WALDEN & ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE. New York: Rinehart, 1948. 304pp. Rinehart Edition #8. A paper-covered school edition with a brief introduction by Norman H. Pearson.
- \_\_\_\_\_. WALDEN AND SELECTED ESSAYS. Edited by George F. Whicher. Review: AMERICAN LITERATURE, XX (May, 1948), 256.
- Wheeler, Mrs. Caleb. THE HISTORY OF THE COLONIAL INN. Concord, Mass.: Colonial Inn, (1948?). A pamphlet history of a building in which Thoreau once lived.
- Wylie, Evan. M. "Thoreau Trails." HOLIDAY, IV (Sept., 1948), 105ff. On Thoreau's 1857 visit to the Maine Woods, illustrated with kodachromes by George Burns. A particularly beautiful piece of work.

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 Albert Lowmes has called to our attention Senator Green's (R.I.) speech in the United States Senate on June 22, 1948, which quotes briefly from Thoreau on the manufacture of hats. So far as we know, this is the first appearance of Thoreau in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.